

## Vulnerable People

We somehow take it for granted that our children can be vulnerable even if we don't give enough thought to reducing the opportunities for advantage to be taken of them. We know that the elderly or the disabled can also be vulnerable. All that provides little intellectual challenge! What is less understood is that there are other types of vulnerability which are not obvious and of which we are unaware.



Examples are:

- The bereaved,
- Partners in troubled marriages
- The survivors of incest or other types of childhood abuse.

## Safe Processes

Within the Church, and within our lives, we must all conduct ourselves in a manner which shows respect and honesty to those with whom we associate or who are in our care.

## Safe Programmes

When a programme is held in a Church building, people assume they will be safe to attend.

This holds true even when the programme may be offered by a group which merely rents or uses the building and organizes the event completely without Church input.

When other groups, e.g. Scouting/Guiding, community groups, musicians, are using Church buildings, care must be taken to define the relationship between the church and the user groups. Any agreement should cover issues such as access to the property, insurance—especially liability, the manner in which the group's staff or volunteers are screened, etc. Parishes should obtain from the user group a "certificate of insurance", naming the Parish and the Diocese on the certificate.

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**Safe Places  
Safe People  
Safe Processes**

*They shall not  
hurt or destroy in  
all my holy moun-  
tain;  
For the earth shall  
be full of the  
knowledge of the  
Lord.  
(Isaiah 11:9)*

## Safe People

If any of you hurt one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a millstone were hung on your neck and you were thrown into the sea. (Mt 18:6)



In making our churches safer places we must:

- ⇒ Safeguard preschoolers, children, youth and vulnerable others in our church from abuse,
- ⇒ Protect the church staff and volunteer workers from potential allegations of sexual abuse,
- ⇒ Limit the extent of legal risk and liability due to any such sexual abuse.

## Safe Environments

When we talk about screening we talk about safe people. We must not forget that it is also very important to create safe environments, that is: safe places and safe situations. The first places that come to mind are the environments we provide for the children.

Questions that could be asked include:

- ⇒ Are two adults required to be present during any activity for young children or youths?
- ⇒ Do the rooms have windows that allow an outside person to see in?
- ⇒ In the case of older children, are there two leaders or an open door?
- ⇒ A leader should not meet alone with a child but should be joined by another leader if the meeting is to be private.
- ⇒ What about arrangements for children using the bathroom?
- ⇒ What about the arrangement for diaper changing? The change table should be in view of the other nursery workers.



## Safe Situations

Safety doesn't apply just to children; it applies to everybody. Helping adults, priests, deacons and other leaders in the church are also vulnerable, and need to be protected.

Some sensible rules, that protect everyone involved, are:

- ⇒ Not being closed up in a room where people cannot see in.
- ⇒ Not being in a car alone with a minor.
- ⇒ When a priest gets called to visit a single distressed person, he or she should take another person with them if at all possible. In an emergency, and failing all else, the priest should tell someone else, spouse or secretary, where he/she is going and how long he/she will be.
- ⇒ If a Pastoral care worker encounters a compromising situation or crisis, they should deal with it in a compassionate manner, then report the incident as soon as possible to the Rector or their Pastoral supervisor.

Transparency in all our dealings with others, is our own best defence.